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SUBJECT: Media Reaction: Deputy Secretary Armitage's conversation with Sri Lankan leaders

**¶11. (U) SUMMARY:** Deputy Secretary Armitage's November 19 telephone conversations with President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, as well as the Department's subsequent press statement, received broad, prominent coverage in the Sri Lankan media and served to reinforce the message that the LTTE must renounce terrorism in word and deed and return to the negotiating table. Local media have also speculated on whether Armitage's impending departure will mean a decrease in high-level American attention to Sri Lanka.  
END SUMMARY.

**¶12. (U)** Deputy Secretary Armitage's November 19 conversations with President Kumaratunga and Opposition Leader Wickremesinghe received widespread coverage in electronic media on November 20. Several radio stations led with the story, as did the independent television station MTV on its evening news broadcasts in all three local languages.

**¶13. (U)** The Deputy Secretary's message was also featured prominently in both English and vernacular print outlets. Independent English Sunday Island bannered (11/21): "Armitage phones CBK, Ranil, condemn LTTE." Government-owned English Sunday Observer carried news of the statement in a front-page headline (11/21): "Return to peace table, U.S. tells LTTE." Government-owned Sunday Times (11/21) carried news of the telephone conversation with President Kumaratunga in an op-ed titled "Doctoring constitution through doctrine of necessity." Vernacular papers widely covered the statement, with three Tamil and one Sinhala papers carrying factual, positive front-page articles reporting the Deputy Secretary's message.

**¶14. (U) COMMENT:** Coming at a time of political instability and several killings by the LTTE, the Deputy Secretary's message served to underscore U.S. commitment to the peace process in Sri Lanka, and to send the oft-iterated message to the Tigers that the group must renounce its violent ways and resume negotiations without further delay. The message and ensuing coverage also served to remind the Sri Lankan public that the U.S. stands firmly behind Norwegian facilitation efforts. END COMMENT

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